

# The Angel in Samson's Birth Narrative

## Judg 13

ERIK EYNIKEL, NIJMEGEN

Angels play a renewed role in today's secularised society because the so-called New Age movement shows a new interest in esotericism and produces therefore all kinds of esoteric literature. Angels and other spiritual creatures are important in this flow of ideas as "sacred messengers of Wisdom, who bring the seekers of truth and goodness to completion of their path".<sup>1</sup>

Angels are only one medium among many in these writings. Beside angels there are elves, devas, spirits, ... all different names for (similar?) celestial messengers.<sup>2</sup> A characteristic definition of angels in New Age is offered by Petra Angelika Peick:

"Engel sind lebendige, energetische Wesen in einer immateriellen, geistigen Wirklichkeit, die parallel zur immateriellen Realität jenseits unserer sinnlichen Wahrnehmung existieren. Sie sind unabhängige Intelligenzen, die sich um die Bewusstseinsentwicklung einzelner Menschen und der gesamten Menschheit bemühen".<sup>3</sup>

The New Age man practices spiritual and mystical exercises, which according to some allow communication with the angels. The more experienced among New Age adherents even succeed, through meditation, in lifting their consciousness to a higher aura, even to the aura of angels and other spiritual beings.

The attractiveness of this esoteric "angelology" is that it responds to the human need for security and protection and at the same time fulfils people's longing for freedom and self-determination. Angels are attractive for these modern people because they represent the "missing link" between the modern pursuit for independence and the pre-modern resignation to fate, two human qualities that make us liable to anxiety.

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1 Newhouse, Engel 7.

2 See Dalichow, Comeback 25.

3 Peick, Engel 27.

Someone who in meditation can become 'like an angel in heaven' can at least for a short time overcome this fear.<sup>4</sup>

The modern concept of angels described above is, according to New Age authors, based on biblical texts in which angels occur as intermediary between God and humans or more generally between the transcendent and the immanent. But as we will see there is a big difference between angels as they occur in the Bible and the concept of angels in modern esoteric literature. To make this clear in the first part of this article we will therefore describe in general terms the concept of angels in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> This will allow us in the second part to situate the concept and function of the angel in the story of Samson's annunciation. Finally we will return to the modern concept and compare it with the biblical concept and check what is the relationship, if any, between them.

## 1. Angels in the Old Testament

### 1.1 Divine messengers (angels) and human envoys.

A problem in defining angels in the Old Testament is that there is no distinctive Hebrew word for the English word "angel". The English word "angel" is of course derived from the Greek ἄγγελος, which translates the Hebrew מַלְאָךְ with the basic meaning "messenger." But this Hebrew word and its Greek counterpart ἄγγελος can refer to human as well as to divine messengers; the difference between these two can only be deduced from the context. It is only in Latin that the distinction between human and divine messengers is made clear in the language: the human agent is called *nuntius*, the divine messenger *angelus*.

That an angel in the Old Testament is an envoy with a divine message does not distinguish him from e.g. prophets and priests, who are also sometimes called messengers (cf. Hag 1:13: "Haggai, the messenger, מַלְאָךְ, of the LORD"; Mal 2:7: "For the lips of a priest should guard

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4 Dalichow, Comeback 27, formulates it as follows: "Engel sind greifbarer und vertrauenerweckender als ein weit entfernter und – durch die Kirchen hindurchgefiltert – als grausam und strafend erscheinender Gott. Engel scheinen für viele eine tiefe, innerlich akzeptable Zwischenlösung zu sein zwischen der Religion, die ihnen durch Erziehung und Gesellschaft noch in den Knochen sitzt, und einer freien Spiritualität, auf deren Glatteis zu begeben sie sich noch nicht so recht trauen".

5 See Fabry / Freedman / Willoughby, מַלְאָךְ, 888-904; Newsom, Angels 248-253; Gruson, Anges 45-53.

knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts"). Priests and especially prophets act and speak in the name of God, who is their commissioner. The use of the messenger formula: "Thus says the LORD" and "oracle of the Lord" demonstrates how the messengers are almost identified with their messages while their personality shifts to the background. It is not the messenger who speaks or acts but his commissioner through the messenger's words and deeds. It is therefore not strange that biblical language had no interest in distinguishing between a human and a heavenly messenger because the messenger usually did not profile himself.<sup>6</sup> The focus on the content of the message instead of the messenger is already visible in the Semitic root *l'k*, that is not used in the Old Testament but in Ugaritic and Punic with the basic meaning "to mediate a message".<sup>7</sup> At the moment of mediation, the messenger identifies himself with the commissioner but this is purely functional and temporary: he speaks "in the name of" the commissioner and represents him at the very moment of delivering his message. This functional identification guarantees the authenticity of the message.<sup>8</sup> Thus the message is usually couched in terms where first person forms ("I") refer to the commissioner, not to the messenger. Since *l'k* means a task or chore in general, and since the messenger does not profile himself it is possible, at least in Hebrew, that a *ml'k* may be an "errand boy" rather than specifically a "messenger."

Consequently, the identification of the messenger with his message is for human and heavenly (angelic) messengers alike. What distinguishes human from heavenly messengers is first of all the "space" from where they come: angels come from God's domain while human messengers live on earth. Prophets, who speak in God's name, can in a visionary experience be present in the heavenly court (Isa 6; 1Kgs 22:19) but they do not belong there. Angels on the contrary constitute the heavenly court, at least that is how passages like Isa 6 and Job 1 are understood; although מַלְאָךְ is not used in these contexts, Isa 6 mentions the שְׂרָפִים and Job 1 the בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים for the members of heavenly court.

A second, more important distinction between angels and human messengers is that angels are less independent beings than the human messengers. Although in principle all messengers' personalities fade away when they execute their mission, in a few cases the human mes-

6 There are a few exceptions e.g. the messenger mentioned in Prov 13:17; furthermore there is Micaiah in 1Kgs 22:13 and the priest Mal 2:7. It always concerns human messengers.

7 Fabry / Freedman / Willoughby, מַלְאָךְ, 888-904.

8 Cf. Cunchillos, Étude 49-51.

sengers act autonomously. In 1Kgs 22:13 the messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah said to him, "Look, the words of the prophets with one accord are favourable to the king; let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favourably". This was not part of the messenger's assignment. And in Mal 2:7 the prophet reproaches the priests: "For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts". Obviously these human messengers even act against the will of their commissioner.

Angels never act against God – at least in the Old Testament literature – because they are an extension of God himself. Often they are called מלאך יהוה and מלאך אלהים.

## 1.2 The angels' task

Angels understandably mediate messages to humans. In the later Old Testament literature they also deliver messages to prophets who then proclaim them to the people of Israel (cf. Zech 1:9-6:5 where an angel is in conversation with Zechariah).

But the angel's task is not limited to the mediation of messages: angels also bring salvation to Israel: an angel goes in front of the Israelites to guard them on the way from Egypt and to bring them to the place that God has prepared (Exod 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:34; Num 20:16). An angel stops Balaam (Num 22:22), helps Elijah out (1Kgs 19:5-8) and defeats Israel's enemies (2Kgs 19:35 // Isa 37:36). The angel is the agent of God's aid for Israel. Although the actions of angels often rouse the Israelites' fear, he is not their enemy but their saviour. In the blessing of Joseph God and his angel are even equated: "The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my ancestors Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude on the earth" (Gen 48:15-16). Therefore to be compared with an angel involves high praise, especially when it is said that one possesses the wisdom of an angel (1Sam 29:9; 2Sam 14:17, 20).

Only once does an angel act against the people of Israel. In 2Sam 24 the angel executes a punishment because David carried out a census. Therefore God let a pestilence grow rampant among the people. This pestilence is spread by an angel of destruction: "when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented concerning the evil, and said to the angel who was bringing

destruction among the people, 'It is enough; now stay your hand'" (2Sam 24:16). The parallel version in 1Chr 21 states more explicitly that God sent the angel to destroy; on the other hand that version avoids naming God as the initiator of David's census and instead blames Satan for it.

### 1.3 The "history" of angels in the Old Testament

On the whole the evolution of the appearance of angels in the Old Testament can be grouped in three periods.

#### 1.3.1 The oldest texts

In the Yahwistic texts of the Old Testament the distance between God and human beings is small.<sup>9</sup> Before the sin in the Garden Yahweh is pictured in very anthropomorphic fashion: he walks around in the garden of Eden, looking for where Adam and Eve are hidden.

In the story of the patriarchs the distance between God and humanity is somewhat larger, although still very small. The first text in the Old Testament where an angel occurs is the sending off of Hagar.<sup>10</sup> The angel appears there suddenly but Hagar has no fear, unlike for instance in later New Testament stories (Zechariah in Luke in 1:11-12 and the shepherds in Luke 2:9). Hagar talks with the angel as with a human being; the angel is almost like an acquaintance. When the angel leaves, Hagar reacts: "she named the LORD who spoke to her, 'You are El-roi'; for she said, 'Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?'" It is striking that the difference between God and his angel is almost nonexistent; not only does she identify the angel with God (El-roi) but in Gen 6:11b the subject suddenly shifts from the angel to God himself. Also in the parallel story Gen 21 Elohim hears the boy crying (Gen 21:17), but it is the angel of Elohim who calls Hagar. There can be no doubt that in the encounter with the angel, Hagar meets God

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9 The sources of the Pentateuch are for several decades already fiercely debated. That the Yahwistic source J (if its existence is accepted) is the oldest source of the Pentateuch is no longer a *opinio communis* but nevertheless some texts of the Pentateuch – assigned in the Wellhausenian hypothesis to J – are considered to belong to the oldest texts (see Campbell / O'Brien, Sources).

10 It is striking that angels appear much more often to women than to men in the Bible. In Judg 13 too it is first Samson's mother who meets the angel.

himself. God's message is Hagar's salvation but God must appear as an angel in order to make that message perceptible.

In the well-known story of Abraham receiving the visit of the three men (Gen 18) we have a similar alternation between God (Gen 18:1, 13) and the men (plural 18:2, 9, 16; singular 18:10, 14) although the men are not called angels in Gen 18. In 19:1 when two of the three men leave for Sodom and Yahweh stays behind together with Abraham, the men are called explicitly angels. This mission of three messengers is unique in the Old Testament. The shift from three to one and again to the plural can be understood as the visit of a party of three, consisting of the main visitor Yahweh and his escort consisting of two men (angels), as they are explicitly identified in 19:1.

When we turn to the story of Moses at the burning bush, the identification of God with the angel is even closer (Exod 3:2-6). The angel appears in the burning bush but when he addresses Moses it is Yahweh who is speaking. Moses then hides his face because he is afraid to see God. The relation between the angel of Yahweh and Yahweh himself is so close that they are almost identical. The angel is the "physical" manifestation of Yahweh on earth, but people experience the encounter as meeting God himself.

### 1.3.2 The pre-exilic period

In a second period the distance between God and humanity enlarges, so that more "space" becomes available for angels as God's aids. This transition is however not abrupt but gradual. In the story of the exodus an angel – as God's assistant – accompanies the people through the wilderness (Exod 14:19; 32:34; Num 20:16). And the oldest servant in Abraham's house gets – according to Abraham – a guardian angel when he seeks a bride for Isaac (Gen 24). But in these stories the angels do not do very much. As in the older phase, they are little more than manifestations of God himself.

However, when we look e.g. to the episodes of Elijah (1Kgs 19:5-7; 2Kgs 1:2-4) we see that the angels act more independently in assisting and serving functions. In 2Kgs 1:3-4 the angel delivers the oracle and God is only mentioned in the messenger formula, but that is because the messenger formula is part of the text of the message Elijah is to deliver. In 2Sam 24:16 and 2Kgs 19:35 the angel executes a punitive

expedition.<sup>11</sup> Angels become intermediate beings between God and people; and are not (only) God's manifestation. Therefore certain honourable people can now be compared with angels (1Sam 29:9; 2Sam 14:17-20; 19:27); angels are now more clearly distinguished from God and comparison with an angel is not the same as comparison with God himself.<sup>12</sup>

This change of function of angels is related to the situation of Israel in the pre-exilic time. The Israelites became aware of their place in the international scene. Yahweh is no longer the migrating companion of the patriarchs or the people in the wilderness. He is the national God who resides in the temple but he is also the God of the entire world.<sup>13</sup> Therefore his dwelling is not limited to the building of the temple. God lives in heaven, as the prophet Micaiah ben Imlah perceived in his vision when he said, "Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, with all the host of heaven standing beside him to the right and to the left of him" (1Kgs 22:19).<sup>14</sup> The larger distance between God and humanity allows for a more independent position of angels as mediators and executors of God's orders.

### 1.3.3 The post-exilic period

In the vision of Dan 7 God is presented as almost totally transcendent. The clouds of heaven that bring the Son of Man to the Ancient One (Dan 7:13) are a clear border between heaven and earth.<sup>15</sup>

This new perspective of God's dwelling has also influenced the understanding of angels and their function. Angels now belong to the heavenly court and the highest number imaginable at that time were serving God: "A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him" (Dan 7:10). God has an entire

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11 There is an interesting parallel to this situation in the tenth plague, even though Exodus does not seem to use *mal'ak* in that passage. The death of the firstborn is attributed to Yhwh himself [Exod 11:4; 12:29; 13:15], but there is also a "destroyer" whom Yhwh deals with as an independent being [12:23].)

12 Compare: after the sin in the Garden God stated: "the human being has become like one of us" (Gen 3:22); while in 1Sam 29:9; 2Sam 14:17-20; 19:27 we have a comparison between men and an angel, the intermediate being.

13 I don't claim that in the pre-exilic period there was already an developed *exclusivist* monotheism. Such a monotheism cannot be dated before Second Isaiah

14 Compare also Isaiah 6, the call narrative of Isaiah, which does not mention angels but seraphim.

15 The clouds have the same function in the New Testament at the baptism in the Jordan river (Mark 1), the transfiguration (Mark 9:7) and the ascension (Acts 1:9).

world for himself and consequently the function of the angels shifted again. The distance between God and human beings had become so extensive that God needed a whole legion of servants to fill the gap. If angels were manifestations of God and his aides in the previous periods, they now get an additional function: the *angelus interpres*. God reveals himself to the prophet in visions that need decoding by an angel, so that the prophet can announce the revelation to the people. Especially in Zechariah we find such an angel-interpreter (see Zech 1:9: "The angel who talked with me said to me, 'I will show you what they are'"). Since their role becomes more important, more attention is devoted to their more complex function and individuality; e.g., they are given personal names: Dan 8:15-16 names Gabriel, the angel-interpreter of the vision Daniel received and Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1 knows Michael as a guardian angel for Israel; in Tob 5-6 the angel Raphael accompanies Tobias on his journey. The same angel that had healed Tobit and Sarah in Tob 3:17 and revealed himself as one of the seven angels who stand ready and enter before the glory of the Lord in Tob 12:15. This last information betrays the belief in a hierarchy of angels because seven have access to God's glory, which implies that others have not.

In Dan 3:25 an angel saves the three men Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were thrown into the furnace of blazing fire; and in Dan 6:22 an angel saves Daniel from the den of lions. According to Dan 13:55 the angel of God will execute the sentence of the attackers of the virginal Susanna. Even prayer on behalf of the people belongs to the function of angels now (Zech 1:12; Job 33:23-26); this is reversing the direction of speech: where angels used to announce God's message to humans, now angels bring human words to God. If we were to continue our research and examine the writings of Qumran, we would find an even more developed angelology with more angels, and new names (Uriel, Sariel, and others) and new functions (such as personal guardian angel of the community members).

## 2. The Angel in Samson's Birth Narrative

### 2.1. What is at stake in Samson's Birth Narrative?

The angel and his performance are not a matter of much debate in the exegetical literature. The most debated point of Judg 13 is whether the story is favourable for Manoah's wife or not. It is obvious to all that the woman is the protagonist of the story and not her husband Manoah,



who seems not to believe his wife when she says she received an unusual, divine message ("a man of God with the appearance of an angel" 13:6) and who therefore prays to God to meet his messenger personally. Nor does Manoah trust what his wife says because he asks the messenger about what to do with the boy ("what will be his rule of life – מִשְׁפָּט – and what is he to do – מִעֲשֵׂהוּ"; 13:12), although his wife had already reported that, quoting – although not verbatim – the angel's message.

Moreover, when the angel refuses to eat the food offered by Manoah and suggests that he prepares it as an offering for Yahweh, Manoah asks the angel for his name while Manoah's wife had earlier declared that he did not tell his name because his appearance was like "an angel" (13:6). Finally when the angel went up to heaven and did not appear again to Manoah and his wife, *he* finally understands what his wife had already presumed from the beginning: they were dealing with an angel. But even then he draws the wrong conclusion: "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (13:22). Manoah's wife understands the situation better: "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and a grain offering at our hands, or shown us all these things, or now announced to us such things as these" (13:23).

The different behaviour of Manoah (timid, uncomprehending, suspicious, sceptical, panicking) and his wife (a good woman, rich in virtues, perceptive, dutiful, tactfully refraining from interfering or interrupting Manoah's encounter with the angel), has led to describing Manoah's wife as "the ideal Israelite woman"<sup>16</sup> or the "model of Israelite womanhood",<sup>17</sup> "counted among the twenty two women that need to be praised (as Prov 31 does)".<sup>18</sup> Others are not so happy with these flattering descriptions since they do not do her justice. Although she is superior to her husband in her interpretation of the events (of the first and the second appearance) and in the identification of the visitor as an angel and in reassuring her panicking husband that the mysterious disappearance of the angel will turn out well since God must have a plan for them, she is unassuming and self-effacing. "She poses no threat", writes J. Cheryl Exum, "she does nothing on her own, which is a trait that patriarchy finds desirable in a woman ... She does not challenge Manoah's authority".<sup>19</sup> Exum holds especially the narrator of Judg 13 responsible for confining Manoah's wife to her role as the

16 Crenshaw, Samson 70.

17 Klein, Triumph 120.

18 van Daalen, Simson 91 n. 1, referring to Schechter, Midrash 337, and Ginzberg, Legends VI 205

19 Exum, Criticism 79.

mother of Samson. She does not even get a name.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, the narrator of chapter 13 is criticised from a feminist perspective as reinforcing traditional role patterns and the exegetes as Crenshaw of role-reinforcing exegesis. We shall now concentrate, however, on the angel's role in the chapter.

## 2.2. The angel in Judg 13

The angel is called מלאך יהוה ten times in Judg 13 (13a, 13a, 15a, 16aα.ββ, 17a, 18a, 20aβ, 21 αα.ββ) out of a total of nineteen times in the book of Judges and fifty-eight times in the Hebrew Bible. In v. 6 Manoah's wife calls him "a man of God" איש אלהים with the appearance of "an angel of God" מלאך אלהים. The narrator copies that last designation in v. 9. Why the narrator once mixes the designation of מלאך אלהים with מלאך יהוה is difficult to explain. According to C. Houtman and K. Spronk it is due to the many occurrences of אלהים in the context of v. 9.<sup>21</sup> It is questionable whether this suffices as an explanation for the use of מלאך אלהים since יהוה is also used often in the context. Of the (only) thirteen occurrences of מלאך האלהים in the Old Testament (Gen 21:17; 28:21; 31:11; 32,1 Exod 14:19; Judg 6:20; 13:6, 9; 1Sam 29:9; 2Sam 14:17, 20; 19:28; 2Chr 36:16) only the passages in Judg 6 (about Gideon) and 13 (Samson) mix the designations of מלאך אלהים and מלאך יהוה. These two episodes in Judges are definitely related: the appearance of the angel, the appointment /

20 Exum, Criticism 79, gives her the name Hazzelponi, the name she received in the rabbinic tradition (Midrash Rabbah to Num 10:5), identifying her with Hazzelponi of 1Chr 4:3. However, the anonymity of the woman is part of the patriarchal character of this text and should not be obscured by giving the woman secondarily a name. Reinhartz, Samson's Mother 156-170, stresses very much that the woman's anonymity and foreknowledge make her similar to the angel. When the woman reports the first divine message to her husband she adds to the words of the angel that the child will be a Nazirite to God from birth to the day of his death. The further course of Samson's life and especially his death in the temple of Dagon in Gaza (Judg 16) demonstrate the foreknowledge and the prophetic gift of the woman.

21 Houtman / Spronk, Held 10 n. 8. Houtman / Spronk consequently translate מלאך by "messenger, viewing the translation "angel" as misleading, since iconographic traditions associate that word with images of winged creatures. Only cherubim (Exod. 25:20; 37:9; 1Kgs 6:24, 27; Ezek 18:8, 12, 16, 19, 21) and seraphim (Isa 6:2, 6) have wings. This reasoning creates new confusion since the word Hebrew מלאך refers sometimes to a human messenger and sometimes to a heavenly messenger. By calling the first "messenger" and the latter one "angel" this distinction is made crystal clear. That the angels of the Old Testament in later iconographic representations are pictured with wings should not disturb us because these images are also part of the reception history of the biblical texts; they give us insight in the "meaning" that later tradition perceived in the biblical text.

announcement of a saviour, the sacrifice put on the rock and consumed by fire followed by the sudden disappearance of the angel. H.-J. Stipp, who together with many others sees a literary dependency between Judg 13 and Judg 6, also considers the name that the angel gives himself "wonderful" פלאי and the designation of Yahweh "him who works wonders" מפלא לעשות as taken from Judg 6:13.<sup>22</sup> However, that Judg 6 also mixes מלאך יהוה and מלאך אלהים does not adequately explain the use of מלאך אלהים by the narrator in 13:9. Possibly the use can be explained from the context: Manoah's wife encountered the angel whom she recognised as a man of God (= prophet), with the appearance of an "angel of God". Then Manoah prays to God to send that man of God again in order to question him about what to do with the child. Thereupon God sends that "angel of God" מלאך אלהים; that is what the woman had assumed he was.<sup>23</sup>

In 13:10, 11 – in the direct speech of Manoah's wife and Manoah respectively – the angel is called "the man". This makes sense since at that point both still considered the angel to be human; he was a "man of God," although an extraordinary one. This was also exactly what Manoah's wife called the messenger when she reported the first encounter to her husband: "A man of God ..., and his appearance was like that of an angel of God, most awe-inspiring". The "man of God" that Manoah and his wife had in mind was clearly a prophet. Prophets sometimes were called by the title "man of God" and they announced divine messages and could do miracles (1Sam 2:27; 9:6-10; 1Kgs 12:22; 13; 17; 2Kgs 1; 2:19-22; 3-7). The annunciation of a miraculous pregnancy and birth was not unusual for "a man of God" (2Kgs 4:14-17). Therefore nothing is unusual in the behaviour of Manoah and his wife when they regard the angel as a human messenger from God, a prophet. Manoah's request to God "to send that man of God again" was therefore appropriate.<sup>24</sup> Also understandable was Manoah's request for the man's name, despite the fact that his wife had already

22 Stipp, Simson 347 n. 35. For the literary dependence of Judg 13 Stipp refers to Kittel, Studien 106; Gressmann, Anfänge 240; Kübel, Epiphanie 225-231; Zakovitch Sacrifice 151-154. For the assumption that the self designation of the angel as "wonderful" is also taken from Judg 6, Stipp refers to Bartelmus, Heroentum 92. Stipp also refers to an alternative explanation for the origin of the name פלאי: Grimm, Name 92-98, explains that the name originally referred to a Canaanite cultic place of *Baal pel'iy*. This was then altered to a Yahwistic installation and the text was adapted accordingly. This hypothesis assumes textual conjectures that, of course, weaken its probability.

23 Redaction critical conclusions on the basis of this terminology (cf. Römheld, Quellen 39-40) are not convincing, see Stipp, Simson 351 n. 48.

24 13:16 explicitly mentions that Manoah didn't know that he was an angel (something his wife has suspected already for a long time but Manoah is slow to understand).

hinted that he would not give it. Manoah assumed that he was dealing with an extraordinary human being, not an angel; his wife assumed that he was an angel and therefore that he would not tell his name.

Whether *פלאי* is the name of the angel – as Stipp assumes, see above – is not clear. The NRSV translates *הוּא־פלאי* as “It is too wonderful”. In that case the answer of the angel refers to the unknowable name of God. But even if *פלאי* is the name of the angel, it is to be considered an indicator of the “total otherness” of God, i.e. his unknowability.<sup>25</sup>

It was only in the ascension of the angel to heaven in the flame of the offering that Manoah understood that he was not dealing with a human “man of God” but with an angel. His panic then is understandable since no one can see God (or his angel) and stay alive – though, in fact, that traditional threat is never realized in the Hebrew Bible: Moses sees God face to face (Exod 33:11), Jacob has seen God face to face (Gen 32:31) and also Gideon met God in person (Judg 6:22) and notwithstanding they did not die because God intended them for a special mission. In the birth narrative of Samson this is no different, and it is Manoah’s wife who understands that better than her husband.<sup>26</sup>

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25 In Gen 32 Jacob also asks for the man’s name. The man – later identified by Jacob with God – refuses to give his name but gives Jacob a new name, “Israel.” This is often compared with Manoah’s request for the angel’s name. But apart from these similarities there are also differences: the man of Gen 32 is never called an angel in that text and the story of Gen 32 is a composite text that probably originally was a pre-Israelite aetiology of a local shrine on the Jabbok honouring a Canaanite hero that had overpowered a demon there. See Tucker, *Criticism* 41-54.

26 Stipp, *Simson* 353-354, explains the clumsy way that Manoah discovers the true identity of the angel as a result of poor imitation of Judg 6: since in Judg 6 Gideon finds out through the miraculous sacrifice that his guest is an angel, Judg 13 needs to do the same. Manaoh and his wife seem in verses 10-12 to have forgotten the numinous character of their guest (see explicitly v. 16) and so the sacrifice can play its role of revealing the true identity of the angelic guest. That Judg 13 is a literary imitation of Judg 6 might well be the case, but I think that Stipp does not consider the narrative development of the text correctly. Manaoh and his wife did not know about the identity of the angel before his ascension to heaven. Manaoh’s wife knew that he was a man of God (she must have thought of a prophet) and he “had the looks of an angel”. Manoah was sceptical and therefore prayed God to send the man of God again (nothing about an angel). When the man of God returned Manoah invited him for a meal but the guest refused and suggested that Manoah offer the food as a sacrifice. When Manoah then asked for his name, so that they might honour him, Manoah and his wife still seem to assume that the man of God is a prophet. It is only in the final act of the angel’s ascension that they recognize the true identity of their guest. (Cf. E. W. Conrad, *Messengers* 90, who comments on Judg 13: “Messengers of Yhwh, then appear as human beings in the Hebrew Bible. They are only perceived as ‘messengers of YHWH’ when they take part in extraordinary activities”). We do not need to assume that Manoah and his wife have “forgotten” anything in the course of the events.

When we now place the performance of the angel in Judg 13 within the general development of the concept of angels in the Old Testament (see part 1), we see that it fits in the series of text that I grouped under the pre-exilic period. The angel as God's messenger bridges the gap between God and humanity. In the older annunciation stories of Ishmael (Gen 16) and Isaac (Gen 18) the celestial visitor is alternately called God and the angel/the man. In Judg 13 the angel is sometimes called angel, sometimes the man of God but never God himself. Only Manoah shouts, "we have seen God" when he recognised the man as an angel (see "Then Manoah realized that it was the angel of the Lord" 13:21). But this is to be understood as "we have seen God's manifestation". God and the angel remain, however, clearly distinguished.

On the other hand, the angel in Judg 13 has no real name (see the discussion of פלאי above). While the angels in the stories of the post-exilic period have names, are quite numerous and have functions in addition to announcing a message, the angel in Judg 13 stays within the traditional frame of the celestial messenger. Therefore, in so far as the performance of the angel is concerned, the allocation of Judg 13 to the group of pre-exilic text is appropriate.

## Conclusion

In the first part of this article I referred to the occurrence of angels in modern esoteric literature. There we saw that people try to imitate or even identify themselves with angels in their esoteric endeavours: raising themselves to the level of angels. When we compare this with what the Old Testament says about angels, and in particular Judg 13 we need to conclude that this New Age concept of angels is absolutely not in accordance with Biblical views. Angels in the Old Testament are the manifestations and the messengers of God to human beings, but this is a one-way street. Never can human beings elevate themselves to the level of an angel. When a person is compared with an angel (2Sam 14:17, 20; 19:27) the comparison refers to moral qualities. The Old Testament in general, and Judg 13 in particular, rather disaffirm the possibility of equalling oneself with angels because the angels have precisely the function of bridging the gap between the human world and the transcendent world of God. And when direct contact between these worlds happens as in the encounter of Manoah and his wife with the celestial messenger, the humans fear that they will die because the heavenly and earthly sphere are (or should remain) separated.

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